

Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Investment Strategies Committee

Draft Meeting Summary

FOR REVIEW AND ACTION

March 10, 1999

Present: Dale Stedman, Chair, Bill Lampson, Vice Chair, Don Briscoe, R. Ted Bottiger, Peter Hurley, Bettie Ingham, Jennifer Joly, John Kelly, Charles Mott, Patricia Otley

Absent: Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Arthur Jackson, Jr., Representative Maryann Mitchell

The Chair called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. He reviewed the minutes from the February 10th meeting and asked for any proposed revisions. The Committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting as presented.

Steering Committee Update

The Chair reported to the Investment Strategies Committee on the recent meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Steering Committee. Recent activities include:

- The Steering Committee reviewed the Commission's budget beginning with July 1, 1999, and developed a request for additional funding until December 1, 2000.
- The Steering Committee changed the Commission's public relations firm from Laird Harris Public Affairs to Cocker Fennessy.
- The Governor has requested representation on the Steering Committee. At the next full Commission meeting in May, a motion will be presented to add Jennifer Joly from the Governor's office to the Steering Committee.
- On the Revenue Committee, Mike Roberts, the senior budget assistant for transportation in the Governor's office, will replace Tim Ceis.
- Dale Nusbaum of the Amalgamated Transit Union has resigned from the Revenue Committee, but he will be replaced by Jim Fitzgerald, a Spokane-based transit union rep.
- Senator George Sellar will be replacing Senator Prince on the Revenue Committee.
- The Steering Committee made a progress report to the Washington State House and Senate in early March. It was well received in both forums.
- The Commission's retreat will be held on September 8th and 9th, but the location has not yet been determined.

Review Work Plan Status and Topic Schedule

The Chair asked Committee members to review the progress that has been made so far in the Committee and the direction that it is headed. A concern was expressed that there was not enough time to cover enough demand-side techniques to the congestion problem. It was decided that the Committee should carry over topics into the next meeting if there is not sufficient time for discussion. The Chair also addressed the process for forwarding information that interested parties send to the Committee. As letters are received, the Chair will review them and forward them as appropriate if the content is relevant to the Committee's work.

Demand-Side Solutions to Congestion

Daniel Malarkey of ECONorthwest presented information on the use of pricing to address the congestion problem. He drew attention to the disconnect between user fees and actual costs of driving on congested roads. He presented several examples of road pricing in the U.S. and abroad that maintained free-flow conditions on priced lanes.

Sam Seskin from Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas in Portland discussed the relationship between land use and transportation. He shared his belief that pricing strategies are the correct way to deal with the problem, but it is difficult to get the public to accept pricing remedies. Land use planning is potentially a second-best solution, as the public acceptability is high, especially in the Northwest. Urban structure, density, land use mix, and urban design all play an important role in travel decisions in measurable ways. Seskin described land use/transportation planning as a "7 percent solution," defined as a small but potentially significant piece of the total strategy. When asked what he would recommend as a solution, Seskins thought that because we currently overuse transportation, correct pricing is the only way to overcome that. In the absence of pricing, regions should adopt a series of "7 percent solutions" that include increased transit capacity.

Supply-Side Solutions to Congestion: Review Draft Issue Papers

Committee members provided comments to staff on the five draft papers addressing potential solutions to the congestion problem. Committee members felt that the papers were helpful. Additional papers were requested on HOV lanes, network optimization, intercity rail transit, and the land-use/transportation connection.

Committee Discussion on Approaches to Congestion

Committee members discussed various issues related to congestion solutions including:

- **HOV Lanes.** One Committee member thought that this was the best solution that he has heard because people actually use them and because it uses incentives to change behavior, rather than penalties. Charlie Howard from the Washington State Department of Transportation confirmed that HOV lanes are very effective where there is demand in a corridor because they can ensure free-flow conditions.
- **Pricing.** People make market choices everyday, so why is there a problem politically when it comes to transportation? People are accustomed to what they have today, and to impose something else would require a change in paradigm. However, HOT (high-occupancy/toll)

lanes may create the momentum for change and acceptability. Giving people choices that allow them to change their own habits is important. Overcoming the fact that people like to drive their cars will be difficult.

- **Rail.** Looking into the future, rail will provide a relief valve and a better mix of modes, even if it is expensive. Intercity rail lines are at capacity now, so someone will have to pay to expand the capacity or update the technology. Because rail is privately funded, prioritizing public usage over freight movement will create a problem.
- **Bus.** In the Puget Sound region, buses are often standing-room-only, especially during commuting times. Currently, 40 percent of commuters to downtown use transit, so it is an important part of our transportation system. In Ottawa, Canada, transit is part of the infrastructure, and land use is brought together with transportation planning from the beginning to encourage ridership and ensure the success of the system.
- **Legislative Feasibility.** Ultimately, the State Legislature will make the final cut when it comes to the Commission's recommendations. In order to gain public acceptance, gradual change will be necessary. Committee members expressed a concern that the members of the Legislature were not attending the meetings in which solutions are discussed. The Chair assured Committee members that every effort is being made to keep them informed. He is distributing the information from the meetings and contacting them when they are unable to attend. Committee members would like to obtain a better understanding of the current thinking of the Legislature with regard to decisions on transportation.
- **Focus on the Future.** Committee members urged that they move out of the immediate politics and make recommendations that may not be politically feasible or palatable now but that can help others learn to accept the change over time. By the time the recommendations are finalized, the transportation system will look different from today: it will include light rail and commuter rail; Referendum 49 money will be spent on various projects; and regional express bus service will be in place. The Committee should focus its efforts on determining what is the proper balance beyond that phase.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.